



ABSTRACT

The provenance of the Rockwell Kent paintings, *Villagers* and *Village Children*, currently housed at the Noel Wien Library in Fairbanks, Alaska, is under question. Scott Ferris, a specialist on Kent, visited the Library's Kent Collection in 1993, and relayed notes on Kent's works. Ferris believes they may be from the 1930's, when Kent traveled to Greenland, rather than 1947 (*Villagers*) and 1962 (*Village Children*). Jake Wien, an independent curator and author on Kent, believes the dates on the paintings to be correct. By researching these paintings, I will show how the provenance can effect the historical value, as well as the financial value in works of art.

WHAT IS PROVENANCE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Provenance, pertaining to art, is the history of the work – the path of creation and ownership which can establish the authenticity. Good provenance almost always increases the value of the work, desirability, and insight into the work's history.

Forms of provenance:

- exhibition or gallery stickers
- statement from the artist
- sales receipt from the artist
- film/recording of the artist referencing the work
- appraisal from a recognized authority
- names of owners
- letters, papers, articles mentioning the work
- mention or illustration in an exhibit catalog
- structural components and mediums used

METHODOLOGY

- In order to try and establish provenance for these paintings I:
- researched the Kent files at the Noel Wien Library
 - took photographs of the front, backs and signatures to show to experts
 - researched the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art
 - traveled to Plattsburgh State University which houses the Rockwell Kent Museum, Kent Special Collections and the Rockwell Kent Legacies
 - traveled to Boonville, NY, to meet with Scott Ferris
 - corresponded with Jake Wien
 - followed leads on exhibitions, exhibition catalogs, sales receipts and Kent's letters

THE EXPERTS

Rockwell Kent traveled and painted in Greenland three times in his life. His trips to Greenland were 1929, 1931-1932 and 1934.

Scott Ferris believes *Villagers* and *Village Children* were started in Greenland for the following reasons:

- a majority of Kent's Greenland works were 34" x 44"; *Villagers* is 34" x 44"
- Kent would paint, then remove the canvas from the stretcher bars for easier transport back home, then he would mount the canvas on plywood – *Villagers* was originally on stretcher bars and then mounted on plywood; *Village Children* has been re-stretched from its original stretcher bars as evidenced by previous tack holes
- Kent used a heavyweight canvas in his Greenland works; Ferris believes both *Villagers* and *Village Children* are painted on this heavyweight, coarser canvas
- the amount of crazing in *Village Children* would indicate an older painting

Jake Wien believes that the dates are correct and that these paintings, based on the palette and paint application, are studio works from 1947 and 1962.

Rockwell Kent's *Villagers* and *Village Children*

The Importance of Provenance in Art

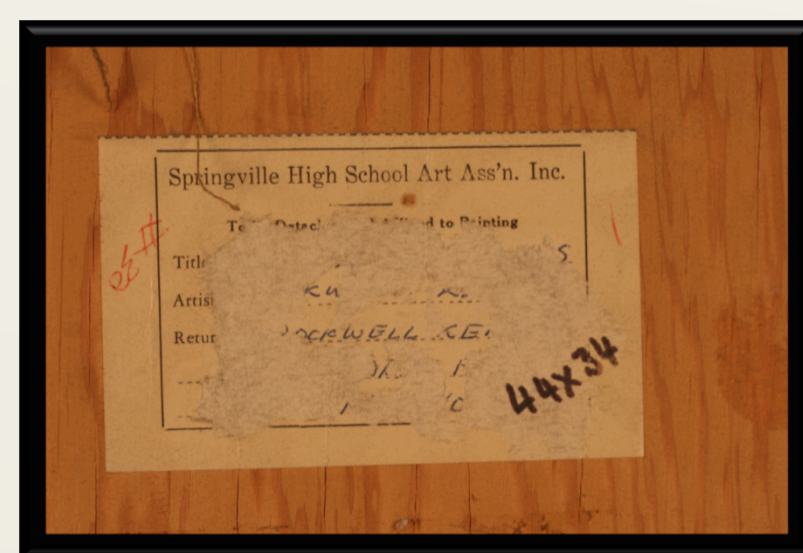
By Lisa Guffey



Villagers (I believe it to be incorrectly titled; should be titled *Two Greenlanders*)
34" x 44"
Oil on canvas mounted on board



Back of *Villagers* including exhibition sticker and coarse re-stretched canvas



Village Children
20" x 25"
Oil on canvas



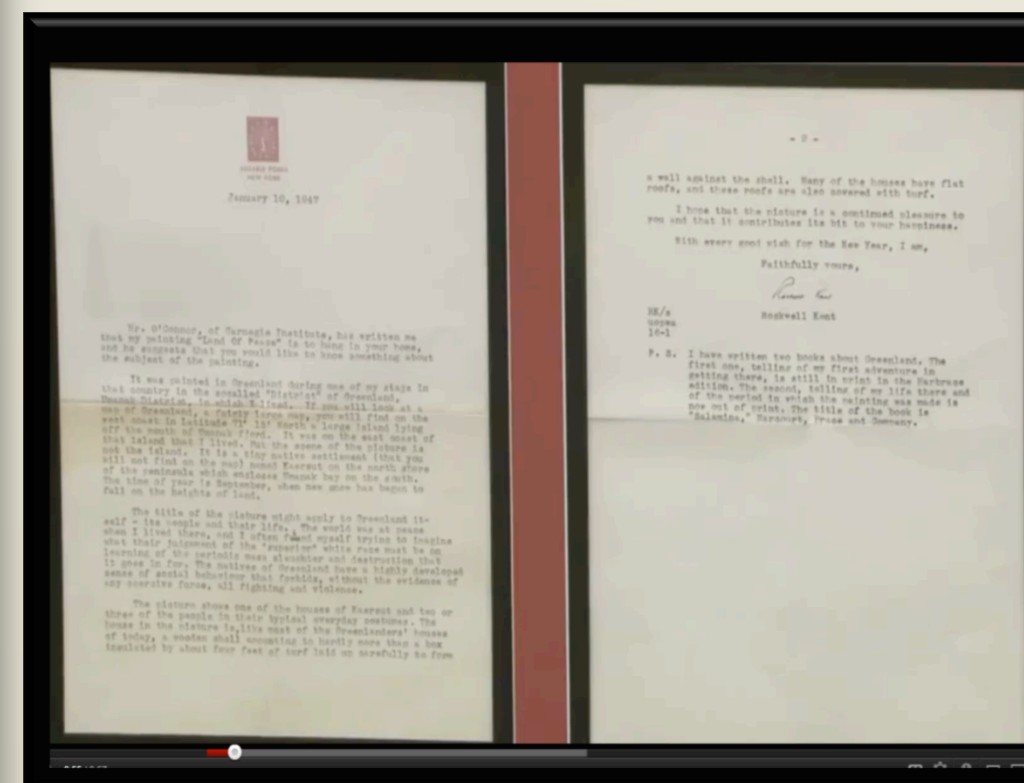
Back of *Village Children* showing re-stretched canvas and water-stain which was indicated to be "old" and most likely predates the painting

In a 1949 letter to a potential client Kent states, "*and among these pictures are some that stem back to Greenland or earlier and which I have taken years of occasional work to bring to completion*".

Carnegie International exhibition sticker including completion date of 1946 and location of origination located on the back of *Land of Peace*



1946 Kent letter to the buyer stating, "*It was painted in Greenland during one of my stays in that country.....*"



CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

Conclusions:

- There is evidence that *Villagers* may have been titled, *Two Greenlanders*; the Springville High School Arts Association (now the Springville Museum of Art) in Utah exhibited *Two Greenlanders* in 1961 as did the Harbor Gallery in New York, in 1966. Exhibition records reveal that a painting called *Villagers* was never shown at Springville, despite the clear Springville label attached to the back of this painting.
- Although circumstantial, there is a case that these works were started in Greenland, transported back to Kent's studio and slowly completed over time.
- A good provenance raises the value of a painting. Kent's *Land of Peace*, for instance, was purchased for \$2000. in 1946. On the Antiques Roadshow (Feb. 27, 2012-date aired) Alan Fausel appraises the painting with an auction value of \$100,000-\$150,000. Once the known provenance is included from the exhibition sticker, completion date and Kent's letter explaining the work, Fausel raises the value to \$250,000.
- Kent's letter referencing *Land of Peace* describes Kent's exact location (down to its latitude coordinates), states that the work was started in Greenland and finished later, and also has an ethnographic importance citing the peaceful nature of the Greenlanders, their everyday clothing and house construction. This shows that provenance has great historical value in addition to affecting the financial value of an artwork.

Questions I am still exploring:

- Are the dates of 1947 and 1962 completion dates, as seen in *Land of Peace*, rather than executed dates stated on the 1974 bill of sale from Kent's dealer, Richard Larcada?
- In the case of *Village Children* – according to the 1997 appraisal stating that the stain on the back is "old" and may predate the painting - if it is really a studio work, why would Kent choose a pre-stained canvas to paint on? Or was it started in Greenland and he used what was available?

REFERENCES

Archives of American Art, Rockwell Kent
Rockwell Kent Legacies, Plattsburgh State University
Rockwell Kent Files, Noel Wien Library
Personal Communication: Scott Ferris, Ashlee Whitaker, Jake Wien
<http://www.artbusiness.com/provwarn.html>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChtKB1bgw-g>

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